

THE HIGH SCHOOL RELATIONS ASPECTS OF FINANCIAL AID

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During the past two years, much has been said and written about the confusion which exists in student financial aid. Based on the number of aid programs, eligibility processes, and delivery systems, this concern is very well justified.

Just considering the major programs and excluding those of a categorical nature such as the Law Enforcement Education Program and the Nursing Assistance Program, we now have two federal grant programs, two federal loan programs, and a federal employment program. Additionally, states and institutions have grant, loan, and work programs. The various application procedures and need analysis systems simply multiply the confusion.

Faced with the growing complexities of program administration and increasing complaints from students, parents, and high school counselors, the financial aid community has begun efforts to alleviate the disorder. Many aid administrators have contacted members of Congress who deal directly with higher education legislation and some have appeared before sub-committees dealing with student aid to discuss the problems. State and regional associations have put forth positions relating to these concerns. The National Association of Student Aid Administrators is doing an effective job of stating our views in Washington. Partly through the instigation and efforts of financial aid administrators, the National Task Force on Student Aid Problems, chaired by Francis Keppel, has come forward with recommendations to improve the situation.

These efforts to simplify the aid delivery systems at the decision-making level should be continued and expanded. However, in our attempts to alleviate these problems we may tend to disregard or overlook what can be accomplished at the "lower" or local level. This is not to imply that the



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delivery systems can be changed at the local level; but with improved and expanded local communication, a great deal of the vagueness and apprehension with which many students and parents approach the aid process can be eliminated.

For planning purposes, the local communication of the financial aid administrator can be directed at three obvious areas: your own institution, the local public, and the high schools in your area. The remainder of this paper will deal with what can be done in the area of financial aid publicity in high schools. The problems which can be expected, the goals to be accomplished, and specific activities and functions designed to achieve the stated goals will be presented.

Efforts in local high schools will not be easy to initiate nor communication readily accomplished; it is probably the area most neglected by the institutional aid administrator. However, placing specific, up-to-date, practical information regarding financial aid in the hands of high school counselors, students, and parents will do a great deal more to lessen their confusion and apprehension than any other effort. In addition the aid administrator receives the direct benefit of dealing with "educated" applicants as they make their initial contact with the aid office.

Some administrators may feel that they are already doing what can be accomplished in this regard and may in fact have successful publicity programs. Many colleges and universities, for example, have special days in which area high school counselors are guests of the institution for meetings which usually provide some financial aid information. Also, institutional admissions counselors are sent out to high schools with some basic aid information in their bag of institutional "propaganda". Financial aid administrators often accompany admissions counselors on such visits.

There are other similar examples, but the problem is now becoming obvious. Too many of our efforts at publicity refer to, or imply, aid available at our institution. *To be most effective in assisting students through area high school contacts, we must become, in the eyes of such students (and most importantly those of their counselors), representatives of financial aid generally and not representatives of the institution.*

There are several obstacles to effective aid publicity in high schools. One involves the activities of the high school counselors. They have a large number of duties to fulfill (testing, arranging class schedules, and providing college materials, etc.), usually with little or no secretarial assistance. A second problem is the increasingly cool reception college representatives receive in many high schools. During the current period of leveling and declining enrollment in higher education, colleges and universities have increased and are more aggressive in their recruiting efforts. A growing number of principals and counselors do not favor, and in some cases resent, the amount of time taken from their daily schedules, as well as those of their students, by college admissions counselors.

Another problem to be faced is the lack of time and money for such publicity efforts created by the many responsibilities of an invariably under-

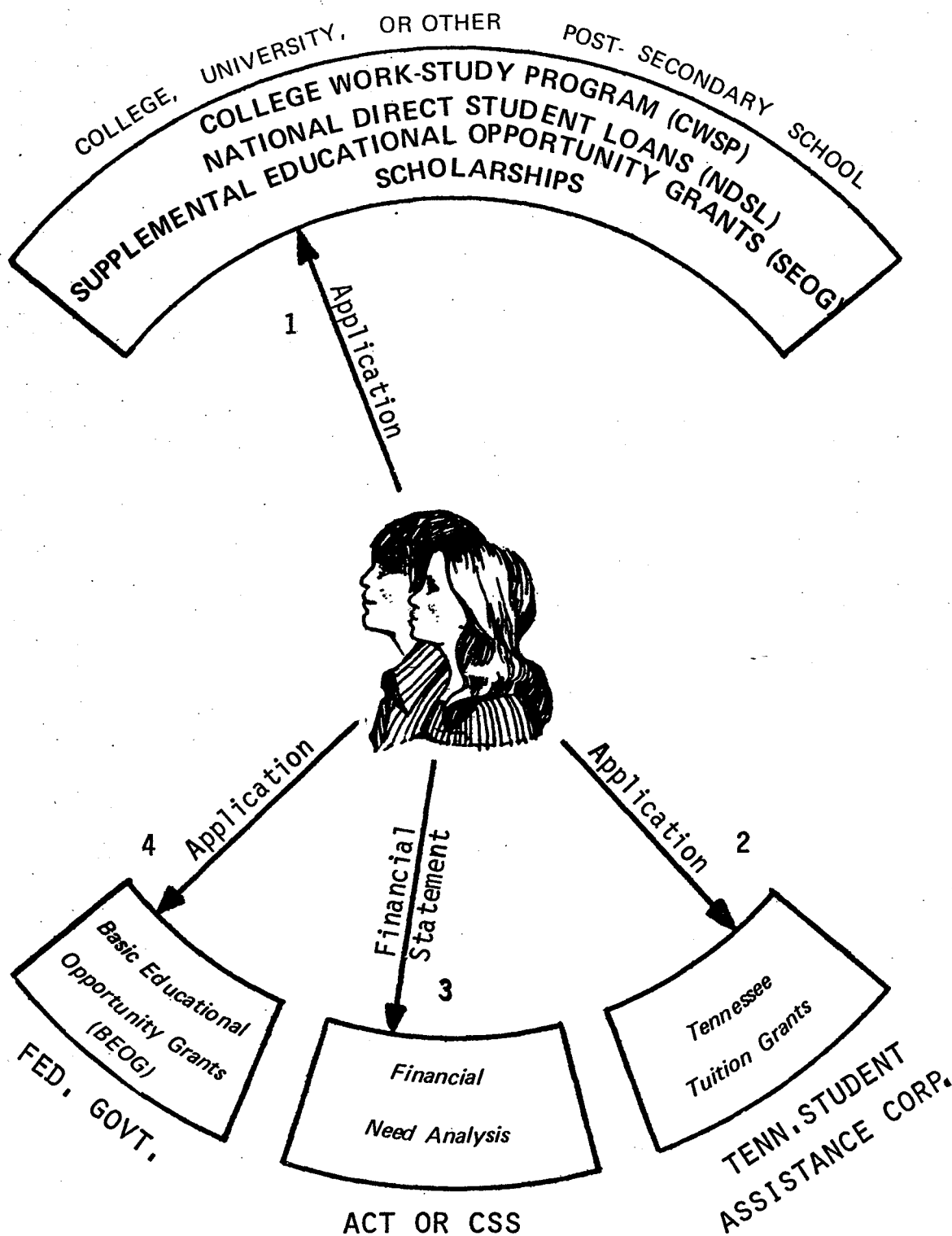
staffed aid office, and of course the current period of budget austerity; which many institutions are experiencing. Despite these problems there are several things which we should attempt to accomplish through high school contacts. They are:

1. Increase the awareness of aid programs of local high school counselors, students, and their parents.
2. Decrease the apprehension and confusion concerning aid programs which exist among these groups.
3. Become the mediator between program sources and local high school counselors concerning program proposals, modifications, and regulations which relate to the application and eligibility processes.
4. Become, for local high school counselors, a representative of the financial aid community, with institutional representation being secondary.

There are various activities which could be carried out to accomplish the above goals. The specific details of each activity should be dictated by local circumstances and needs. Such activities could include:

1. *Mail relevant articles and materials to local counselors.* Financial aid administrators receive information from the Office of Education, the American College Testing Program, the College Scholarship Service, and other organizations which are not necessarily available to high school counselors. Some of this material, such as information concerning the Basic Educational Opportunity Grant (a program in which high school counselors are more directly involved than others), is related to the application segment of the aid process and would assist them in working with students.
2. *Write and mail a periodic newsletter to counselors.* Depending on the number of high schools involved, this and the above activity may be somewhat expensive and time-consuming, particularly for the smaller institution. Here the state financial aid association may be able to undertake a counselor newsletter project. However, such an alternative would decrease the impact on goal number three stated above, which a local newsletter would have. In either case, such a newsletter would not only provide the counselor with valuable information, but would also impress on the counselor that he/she is considered by the aid community as an important part of the financial aid process.
3. *Visit local counselors with current financial aid information.* These visits could be made either with your institution's high school representative or independently. They would put across the idea of the administrator being a financial aid resource person, not simply a representative of a particular college. This activity requires keeping abreast of new developments in financial aid and relating pertinent information to the counselor.
4. *Provide local high school students a brief brochure or booklet explaining the basic aspects of federal, state, and typical institutional programs.* The Office of Education has a small pamphlet explaining the

five federal programs; most states have brochures describing state programs; and institutions generally have financial aid brochures. However, the student usually has no publication which attempts to tie all resources together. Of benefit to students and parents would be a booklet which emphasized application procedures and was suitable for use by students applying at various institutions. An illustration of this is the following key diagram which is taken from a booklet entitled *Financial Aid for Tennessee Students — Applying Made Easy*.



5. *Be receptive to, and possibly attempt to create, opportunities to conduct brief counselor workshops in financial aid.* The federally sponsored counselor workshops on Basic Educational Opportunity Grants held the past two years have accomplished a great deal in counselor awareness and should be continued. However, many counselors have not attended the workshops and/or could receive additional beneficial information in a small group session conducted by the "local" financial aid administrator. An ideal time for scheduling would be a few hours during an in-service training day.
6. *Communicate to local counselors a willingness to speak to high school students concerning financial aid generally.* Like the workshop suggested above, this activity would not be effective until the aid administrator becomes the mediator identified in goal number three. The activities previously mentioned would assist in accomplishing this goal.
7. *Host a workshop on college costs and financial aid designed primarily for parents.* Area high school counselors can be included in the planning, and financial aid administrators from the four to six institutions at which most students in the area enroll can contribute as resource personnel. So that the "institutional" concept of aid may be eliminated, each of the aid administrators could present one of the following general topics: typical costs, scholarships, grants, loans, employment, general application procedures, etc. Specific information typically needed by parents could be given in separate groups following a general session.

In summary, financial aid is complex and often confusing. With the basic goal of assisting all needy students to continue their education beyond high school, we in financial aid administration should be alert to every opportunity to accomplish that end. One of the best methods of assisting is to communicate information on what is available and how it is secured. In short, know the programs, know the procedures, and get the word out.